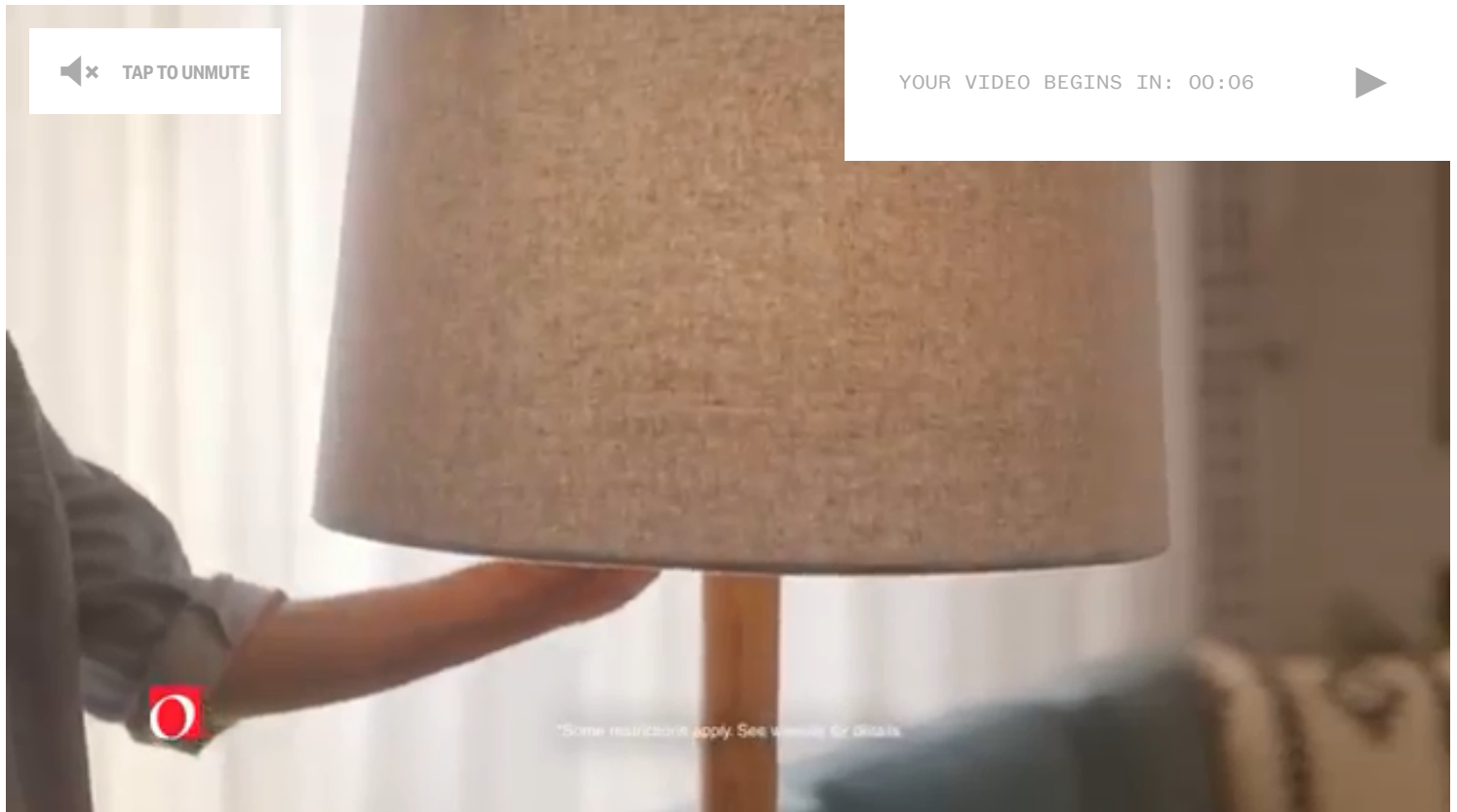


CORONAVIRUS

California orders thousands of body bags as Covid death toll grows

The grim preparations are a sobering reminder that the state is in a dangerous situation, the governor said.



Dec. 15, 2020, 8:13 PM PST

By Phil Helsel

California has purchased thousands of body bags and has dozens of refrigerated storage units on standby as it prepares to deal with a growing death toll from Covid-19.

The orders for 5,000 body bags and 60 53-foot-long refrigerated units to have ready for counties and hospitals should be a sobering statistic, Gov. Gavin Newsom said.

Although vaccines have begun to arrive, the crisis is far from over, Newsom said.

"There is light at the end of the tunnel, but we're still in the tunnel," he said at a news conference Tuesday. "And that means we're going through perhaps the most intense and urgent moment since the beginning of this pandemic."

Newsom, a Democrat, said there is reason for optimism: Vaccines began being administered Monday, and the state expects to have 2.1 million doses by the end of December.

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He urged people across the state to wear masks, keep their distance from others and take other steps to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

"I want to remind folks: It's not the flu. This is not something to trifle with," Newsom said. "This is a deadly disease, a deadly pandemic, and we're in the middle of it right now."

Large parts of the state are under stay-at-home orders.

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About 32,300 new Covid-19 cases are reported across the state each day, a number Newsom said was historic, and the positivity rate had risen from 6.9 percent at the beginning of the month to more than 10 percent Monday.

The number of people hospitalized for Covid-19 in California rose from around 8,500 on Dec. 1 to around 14,200 on Monday, he said.

And the state's intensive care unit capacity averages around 5.7 percent statewide, Newsom said. The lowest capacities are in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley.

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There have been more than 21,000 deaths from Covid-19 in California, according to [the state health department](#).

The average number of deaths from the disease in the state was 163 a day as of Monday, Newsom said, using a seven-day average. On Nov. 14, the average daily number was 41.

A national [ensemble forecast](#) to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention predicts that the Covid-19 death toll could exceed 362,000 by Jan. 2.

More than 16.7 million cases had been reported in the United States by Tuesday evening, and more than 304,000 people have died, according to [an NBC News count of reports](#).



Phil Helsel



Phil Helsel is a reporter for NBC News.

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